

NTT INDYCAR SERIES

News Conference

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R.C. Enerson

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: Joined now by R.C. Enerson, who is driver of the No. 50 Abel Motorsports Chevrolet, eyeing a return to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in a second run at the Indianapolis 500 presented by Gainbridge. May is going to be here before we know it. How excited are you about this opportunity?

R.C. ENERSON: Really excited. The goal is to be back again. We had so much fun last year, and I think we had a really good performance for a new team, my first time once we qualified in, getting all the practice in. And it was a big learning curve, that's for sure. Hopefully this year the goal is to be more prepared, and now that we've done it, it's just doing it again.

Q. I know the whole crew had a blast last year and Bill was on cloud nine. Just the whole energy from the team was -- can you get into what it was like last year?

R.C. ENERSON: Yeah, our sole focus was to make the field. So I don't think we ran in traffic a single lap up until after qualifying. So we were dead set on trying to make it in, and we succeeded with that. And the crew -- the emotion on qualifying day, which all the way up to the 500, seemed like time could not slow down at all -- it was just full throttle all the way through.

It seems like you don't have time and then you get to qualifying day and it feels like it's a week long. It was amazing. The crew was amazing. Bill, John, everything went right for us that day.

I still think we had more speed left in the car after the first run we did.

Q. What did you learn ultimately from last year, not only the race but just the couple weeks in general?

R.C. ENERSON: It was definitely a busier schedule than I'm used to. That was a very busy two weeks. The learning curve in the car was -- the biggest part was just running in traffic. You have so many tools at your disposal. Like on a road course we're used to just staying to roll

bars. When now you get on an oval and not only do you have anti-roll bars, you've got 20 weight jacker clicks.

And it's just a lot to take on. The first day running in traffic I was more mentally exhausted in the one-hour practice session than I'd been all of it combined.

Q. Now that you've lived this, is your comfort level a little bit different now this year?

R.C. ENERSON: Yeah, I think we're just going to be more prepared and I'm going to know what to expect from the car, especially when we start trimming out and then on qualifying day when we turn up the boost. And the biggest one that I'll have more experience in is just running in traffic, because that was the real battle the entire time.

Q. When you were qualifying for the Indy 500 and you looked down pit lane and see the drama playing out at a well-established, highly funded team at Rahal Letterman Lanigan, and here you are hardly even a startup team, and what you had achieved and what they were going through, were there times when you just wanted to exalt in the moment, or did you ask yourself, is this really happening?

R.C. ENERSON: Yeah, it was a bit of a pinch-me kind of day. Especially just qualifying day in general was nuts for us. I remember I think I sat on the toolbox in the garage with timing and scoring up on my phone for about three hours. And you're sitting there, and the only way we would go back out is if we dropped out into the 30th spot to where we'd have to participate in Bump Day. That was the only way we would go back out.

And just kind of sat there, and then they actually got me back in the car for the last, I think it was 30 minutes, of qualifying where you have the line that went all the way through Gasoline Alley, people jumping around. So that was -- it was exciting. But once we say the one run go out and we knew there was only one more car that could make it on the time, we knew we were kind of locked. And it was just -- they wouldn't let me get out of the car until the garage because I was freaking out.

Q. (No microphone.)

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R.C. ENERSON: Yeah, it was really good. The fact that I didn't have to suit up and run on Sunday was great. It would have been great to suit up for pole, but our goal was let's just make sure we were in the show. And we were able to achieve that even though we were pretty much the unanimous pick to be bumped.

Q. Is the goal with your program to do more races down the road this year, next year?

R.C. ENERSON: I think it kind of all just depends. You look at funding, you look at -- they also have a full Indy NXT program going on right now, so you don't want to interfere on that. The Indy 500 doesn't interfere with anything on the Indy NXT schedule. So I think that's what really opens that up. I think the goal would be to look past future 2024. I think 2024 running the 500 is kind of just the sole focus.

Q. What do you do when you're not getting ready for the 500 to keep in race shape?

R.C. ENERSON: I am full-time coaching, whether it's private coaching, but mainly just full time at the racing school, Lucas Oil School of Racing. So anybody with a driver's license, or these karter kids where I went into a racing school coming through, we're their first stop going from go-karts to cars. And we run an event per month.

I'm the one that answers the phones for it, emails, everything. That's my full-time gig. I love teaching these kids that -- kind of trying to be the role model that I had when I was their age and help grow the sport. We need more drivers in every series.

Q. Where is that located?

R.C. ENERSON: Lucas Oil School of Racing, our shop is based in the Tampa-Bradenton area. We're in New Port Richey, but that's just where our base is. We go to tracks, Sebring, Homestead. This year we'll be at Mid-Ohio in the summertime, Kentucky, Chicago Autobahn.

We kind of go everywhere, so we're mobile. But we host these events and we can take on 36 or so students on a two-day program. And then we also run our race series, which is the jumping point for them to get into, say, the ladder system, USF2000, that program.

Q. When they see and hear that you ran in the Indianapolis 500, does that change the --

R.C. ENERSON: It's like a 50/50 shot. Half of them have no idea, and then half of them will ask me about it. I have

no problem talking about it with them. Most of the questions I get from them are just like, hey, what was it like going through the whole ladder system? Not necessarily where I'm at right now. It's because they're wanting to get to there.

So it's like, what did you do and what class did you run? Did you go through the whole thing with them?

The other thing is they're like, how do I get sponsorship? It's like, well, we're still figuring that out, too, and it's a never-ending battle. One day at a time.

Q. You're a Florida native; your dad is a local Southport High School graduate. When you made this field and you just had that time with your family, what were those conversations like? How special was it for him to see his son running the race that he grew up here just a few miles south of here?

R.C. ENERSON: It's pretty amazing. I've been going to the 500 with my dad too since I was three years old. It was my first 500, so that would have been 2000. And he's been going to it since he was a kid, as well. To come up through that many years of karting, where it was more or less just a hobby, through karting, finally getting into cars, pro racing, all the work that had gone into getting to INDYCAR. But after we already got to INDYCAR, then it took another six years to get to the 500.

It's been a never-ending battle, but our motto is never quit. You just keep pushing, finding opportunities, seeing what we can do to keep being on track.

Q. I know obviously the Southport connection. Did your dad and Robin Miller have any kind of connection at all?

R.C. ENERSON: I believe my dad's older brother and Robin Miller had a connection. I think my dad's older brother worked on his car, one of his Formula Fords, 1600, something like that.

Q. Heading into this year, how important is it for you -- you ultimately didn't get to finish the race, but how important is it that you managed to get some race laps under your belt at the 500, and how much of a boost do you think that will be heading into this year?

R.C. ENERSON: I think it will be -- it's like anything else, every time you do it -- it's just going to keep getting easier every time you keep doing it. The first time around, that's when you're the most nervous. That's when you're going to make the small mistakes. And when you come back the next year, you know exactly what you're supposed to



expect.

Like I said, I think the biggest learning curve, especially in race mode, was just running in traffic. I talked to a couple of the drivers because I was like, I feel like I have no idea what I'm doing.

But they're like, no, you're doing the right things. It's just really difficult to pass.

I was like, okay, at least I'm headed in the right direction.

All the tools you have, it's just a lot to take on. And now the more I did it, once I got to the race, it was finally the point I got comfortable running in traffic and being ahead on my tools and kind of knowing where I need to place the car. It took a bit to get there.

Q. Heading away from the 500, is a full-time INDYCAR opportunity something you would be keen to try and push you?

R.C. ENERSON: I think everybody would be pretty keen on trying it, but that's the goal. This year -- that's the problem with trying to be full-time is you've got to plan it so far in advance. It's not like something you can do a month before the season starts. It's got to be in the works almost a year prior. The goal would be to run the 500 this year and then look forward to 2025 and seeing what the possibilities are.

Q. Thinking back to last year, if I remember right, John Brunner didn't get a chance to get the engine lease locked up until April, so that put a dent in the chances to go to the open test. The fact that these things are kind of situated already and kind of in place, you don't have to go straight from the track to learning tools. You're going to have a chance to have the open test this year to maybe play around with that. Is that kind of the plan?

R.C. ENERSON: That would definitely be on the radar. I think we would have been in a lot stronger spot had we made the open test, but still, it wasn't just us looking at the 34th entry. There was a couple other cars that were prospected to be there. And it wasn't until -- I think it was after Texas that we were finally able to be 100 percent we got an engine, we're ready to go.

I think being -- again, it's more preparation time where we only had a certain amount of time to prep for last year. We have double the amount this year to get ready, so we're just going to show up a lot more prepared.

Q. On the other end of that, for you personally, what

are the chances of you getting more opportunities in the Chevy sim to get ready now that -- obviously being with Chevy last year, you assume that's kind of probably the case this year?

R.C. ENERSON: Yeah, I've actually never been in the Chevy sim. I've been on my simulator at home, but I haven't got a chance to be in the Dallara or the Chevy simulator. That would be pretty cool. I think that would be a lot more fun than anything else.

I think with the amount of time we have in front of us to May, it's just going to be a lot better of an opportunity than even last year was, even though we did so well last year.

Q. How much work do you put in during the off-season to do events like this, like sim racing and all that, like for the 500?

R.C. ENERSON: As far as sim racing goes, we do it for fun. I feel like a lot of us just do it for fun. Whenever I have an evening off and not really doing anything else, what better video game to play than the thing I like to do the most?

I have a bunch of friends that I've met through there. Since 2020 happened, we were internet racing all the time. I met a lot of cool guys and do a bunch of league racing stuff, and it allows me to do the thing I love to do most for just fun on the side. But I don't do it necessarily to prepare.

But I guess it keeps the reflexes there, and you're just constantly able to drive something.

Q. Over the years I've been watching these races, I know you have to keep a lot of reaction time to stay sharp for these races. How do you train for that?

R.C. ENERSON: To be fair, I haven't done a lot of the reaction training. If I was based here in Indy, I'd be at PitFit doing the D2 machine and a lot of that stuff. But I guess it's just being on the sim. And I do get to drive the school cars every single event we go to. I feel like I have a million miles in those things over the past eight years.

So I actually get to drive a car on track. It's not necessarily as fast as an INDYCAR, but it gets my butt in a seat and I'm able to turn a bunch of laps every time we go to an event.

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